MARXOLOGY
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Street Cinderella

THE NEWS-PALLADIUM, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1918

BELL OPERA HOUSE, SATURDAY, SEPT. 28

The Marx Brothers Musical Comedy Stars In

The Cinderella Girls

A New Farce Comedy in Three Acts

Beautiful Girls | Beautiful Music | Beautiful Love Story

Curtain 8:15. | Seats on sale. | Phone 624

The Cinderella Girl (a.k.a. **The Street Cinderella**) was one of the few fiascos the Marx Brothers ever experienced. The show was written by Jo Swerling (who also wrote the script to **Humor Risk**) and featured songs by Gus Kahn and Egbert van Alstyne. Few details are known about the show but a contemporary notice describes it as *"a love story of a couple of street singers"*.

Jim Dalgleish, night editor with The Herald-Palladium Daily newspaper in Benton Harbor, Michigan, has recently found several newspaper ads for the show. One issue had a photo of the chorus girls and the ads said it was *"a new farce comedy in three acts ... beautiful girls, beautiful music, beautiful love story."* One ad said it was presented by Minnie Palmer and included critics blurbs from Chicago, another said the brothers *"really know their business"*.

The show opened in late September 1918 in Grand Rapids, Michigan (although Charlotte Chandler says in her book *Hello I Must Be Going* that the show *"opened and closed in Battle Creek, Michigan"*). This was during the Spanish influenza epidemic and since local health regulations allowed the theaters to sell only every other seat and every other row there was no chance whatever of merely breaking even at the box office. The premiere was awful and at the beginning of the second act, Groucho stepped forward and said: *"Folks, that first act wasn't so good. We're gonna ad-lib from now on."* In *The Marx Brothers Scrapbook* by Groucho Marx and Richard Anobile, Groucho said it *"was a terrible act and we realized that we couldn't play it successfully"*.

The internal balance of the group was also changed at this time since Gummo joined the US Army and was replaced by Zeppo. Zeppo says in *The Marx Brothers Scrapbook* that *"my mother called me up to tell me that Gummo was leaving for the army and that she wanted to keep the name **The Four Marx Bros.** intact. She insisted I join the act and that's what I did."*

In his *Marx Brothers Encyclopedia* Glenn Mitchell adds that the brief, discouraging engagement in Grand Rapids was followed by *"five indifferent days in Benton Harbor, closing on 3 October"*. These performances took place at the Bell Opera House in Benton Harbor, Michigan.

According to the chronology section in Simon Louvish' book *Monkey Business - the Lives and Legends of the Marx Brothers*, the show played into November. This was possibly somewhere in New York City (see notice from *The New York Clipper*) and it may have been during this later run that the show was renamed **The Street Cinderella**.

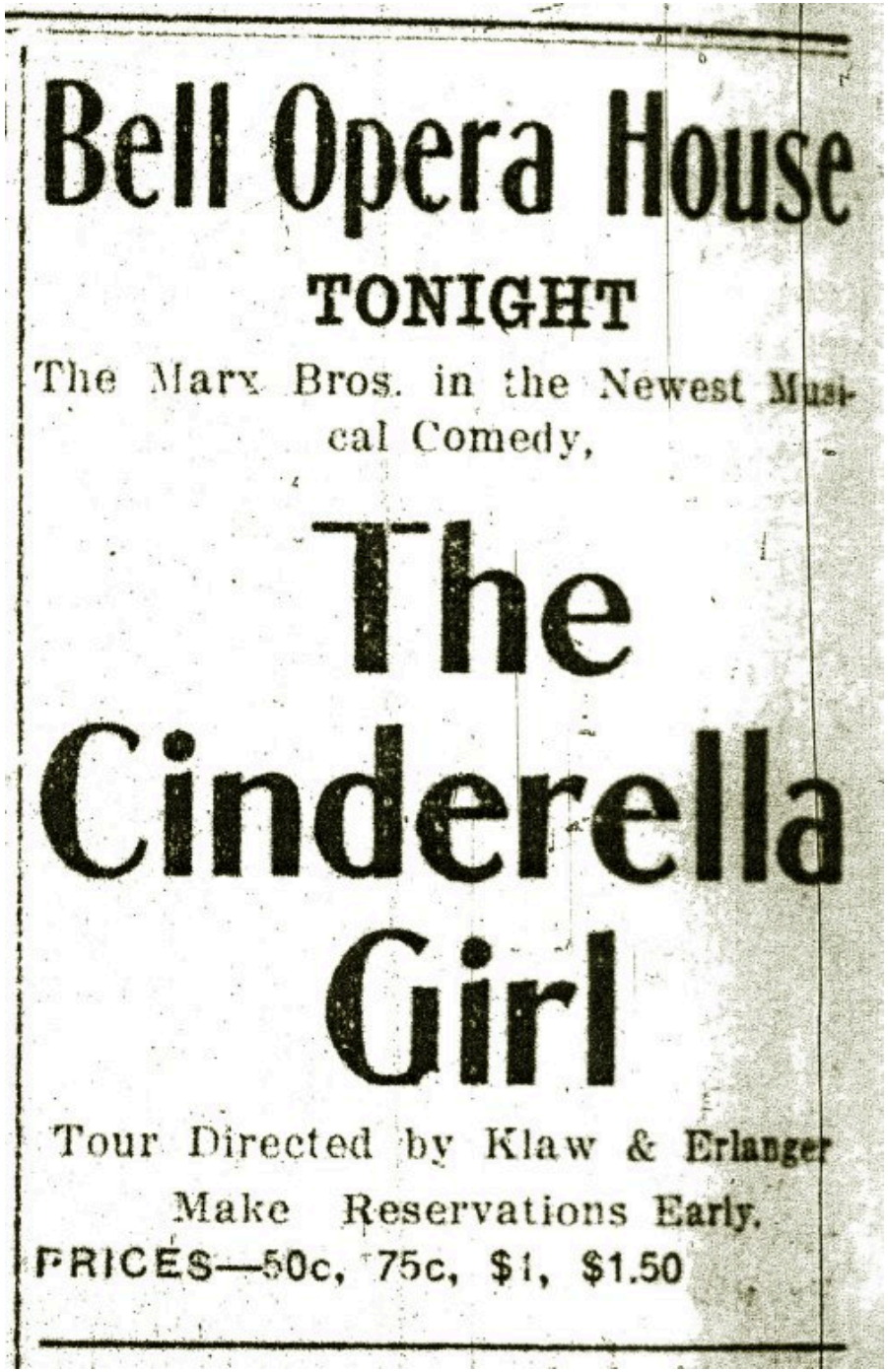
At least one of the **Cinderella**-compositions by Gus Kahn and Egbert van Alstyne may have been salvaged when **Cinderella** flopped, namely **Sailin' Away on the Henry Clay**, which was published in 1917 and appeared in later versions of **Home Again**. Grace Kahn, the wife of Gus, mentions the song in Charlotte Chandler's book *Hello, I Must Be Going* when recalling her days as a song plugger for Chicago-based music publisher Jerome H. Remick; *"Now, at this point Groucho was doing an act in Grand Rapids, something in vaudeville, so my boss sent me to Grand Rapids to get Groucho to sing a song when he arrived in Chicago. Groucho liked the song, and when he got to Chicago he sang it."* Chandler asks if Grace remembers the song she were plugging for Groucho, to which Grace replies. *"Yes, I certainly do. **Sailin' Away on the Henry Clay**, that was the name of the song. They'd travel around the*

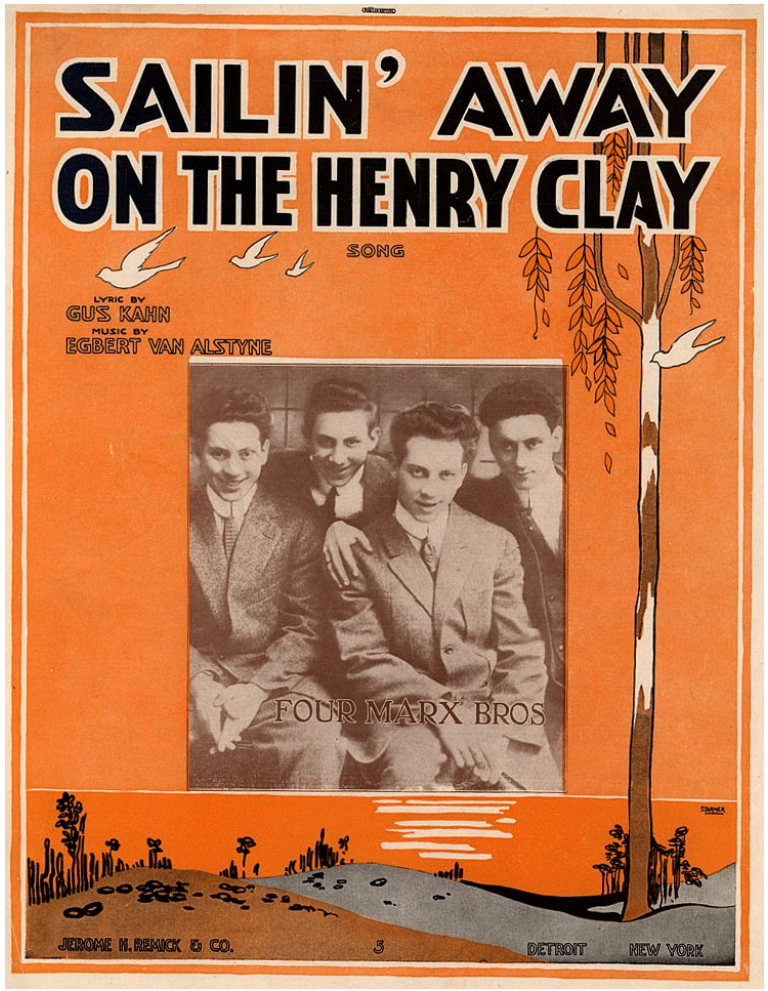
country for about a year in those days, and Groucho kept the song on for all that time."

Gus Kahn died in 1941 but two years later his and Grace's daughter Irene married Groucho's son Arthur. Groucho remained friends with Grace for the rest of his life and they also had grandchildren Steve and Andy Marx in common.

Some other Kahn/van Alstyne-titles found on the net also fit chronologically as **Cinderella**-leftovers, like **I Can't Get Along Without You** (copyrighted in 1918) and **You're In Style When You're Wearing a Smile** (with words and music by Al. W. Brown, Gus Kahn and Egbert Van Alstyne). **For Your Boy and My Boy** was published by Remick and used in a Liberty Loan drive to sell bonds in order to support the allied in World War I. It was performed by Al Jolson and reached No. 4 on the top 100 US songs of 1918 with a recording by the Peerless Quartet. The prophetically entitled **What Are You Going To Do To Help The Boys** was published in 1918 (also by Remick) while **Your Eyes Have Told Me So** (written by Kahn/van Alstyne together with Walter Blaufuss) appeared in a 1919-movie called **Sing Me A Love Song** (which - by the way - was filmed again in 1936).

In November 2001, I was in contact with Jo Swerling Jr, the scriptwriter's son, but he couldn't shed any more light on **Cinderella**. In an e-mail, he wrote: *"During my early years, I had the pleasure of being with Groucho and Harpo on many social occasions with my parents. Groucho was always "on", while Harpo, not unlike his on-screen persona, was much quieter and more reserved than his brother. Unfortunately, my father didn't leave anything in writing about his friends, the Marx Bros., nor do I recall any verbal anecdotes that aren't available in books or articles already published about them. I do remember one occasion when we were having lunch with Groucho at Nate and Al's, a legendary Beverly Hills delicatessen. Groucho turned to a middle-aged woman in the next booth and politely asked her if he could borrow a pencil. Of course, she recognized him and happily handed him one, which he then used to poke a hole in the end of one of his signature cigars before lighting it. He then handed the astonished woman her pencil back. I've often wondered if she kept it as some sort of hallowed celebrity artifact."*.


Bell Opera House
TONIGHT
The Marx Bros. in the Newest Musical Comedy,
The Cinderella Girl
Tour Directed by Klaw & Erlanger
Make Reservations Early.
PRICES—50c, 75c, $1, $1.50



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At the Bell

Tonight the Marx Bros. will appear at the Bell opera house in a new musical comedy, "The Cinderella Girls," a beautiful love story of a couple of street singers. The Marx Bros. have appeared in every big city and have a wonderful reputation as musicians and comedians, and it is truly said that Arthur Marx is to the harp what Mischa Elman is to the violin and Leonard Marx is the ragtime Paderewski of America. Harold Marx, assisted by Jean Maddox, do a bit of society dancing that is startling. The Marx Bros. have never before appeared in one night stands. The company number twenty-five. The tour is booked by Klaw & Erlanger of New York.

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WILL BE FEATURED

The Four Marx Brothers, vaudeville headliners, will be featured shortly in a romantic farce called "The Street Cinderella." Music is by Jo Swerling and Egbert Van Alstyne and lyrics by Gus Kahn. The cast includes, in addition to the Marx Brothers, Betty Carpenter, Edward Metcalf, Richard Kean, Mary Orth, Saba Wilson, Gene Maddox and a chorus of twelve.

New York Clipper, 2 October 1918